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Reagan Says 1,000 Readied As Mideast Suicide-Bombers

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As many as 1,000 terrorists, many of them Iranians, were assembled in Lebanon to conduct suicide-bombing attacks similar to the one on Oct. 23 in Beirut that killed 240 U.S. servicemen, President Reagan said this week.

Reagan made the comment Wednesday at a closed meeting of Citizens for America, a staunchly pro-Reagan political action group.

White House officials confirmed yesterday that a "substantial number" of terrorists had been trained to conduct such attacks in Lebanon, and one official likened them to Japanese kamikaze pilots who dove their planes into U.S. ships during the final months of World War II.

Some of the Reagan supporters who attended the meeting left with the impression that the president was talking about the possibility of suicide-bombing attacks in the United States. This is apparently because Reagan had been asked about the dangers of a bomb attack at the U.S. Capitol when he gives the State of the Union address late next month.

The president never answered this question directly, and a tape of the meeting seems to show that he was talking about the prospect of future suicide bombings in Lebanon rather than in the United States.

However, one official said that recently beefed-up security at the White House, including use of dirt-filled dump trucks and concrete barriers, although not directly related to

the suicide-bombing threat, "was taken in this context."

Asked at the meeting about the danger of a bomb attack during the State of the Union address, Reagan replied that he shared his listeners' concern about security.

"I tried it the other way once outside the Hilton Hotel," Reagan said, referring to the attempt on his life in March 1981. "I didn't like it."

When his questioner then asked again about the suicide attack on the U.S. Marine headquarters compound in Beirut, Reagan replied:

"Yes. This is the great tactic of the terrorists in which it is a suicide mission. We have information right now that they have marshaled a force, particularly of Iranians in Lebanon, that numbers up to 1,000 who are all willing to sacrifice their lives in a kamikaze attack."

One official said such information may have been classified and agreed that Reagan might have described it as "a leak" had someone other than the president revealed it. He added that Reagan had a right to release the information.

At the time of the attack, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger said "circumstantial evidence" linked Iranians to it. Officials said they based this assessment on observation of Iranian activities in Beirut soon after the bombing.

A principal suspect in the assault is a radical Lebanese Shiite splinter group headquartered in the Bekaa Valley of eastern Lebanon, which is controlled by Syrian forces.

That group has strong ideological and financial ties to the Iranian government of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and several hundred of Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards operate in the same area of Lebanon.

Security around Reagan has been tightened visibly in the weeks since the attack, for what officials said are precautionary reasons.

Two days ago, when he traveled to Indianapolis, every intersection along a 10-mile route from the air-

port to downtown was blocked with dump trucks, and the convention center where he spoke was surrounded by buses and more dump trucks.

The security measures, particularly frisking and handbag checks of visiting educators to whom Reagan spoke, attracted front-page attention in Indianapolis newspapers.

Departures were delayed by 90 minutes at Indianapolis Airport, which was closed when Air Force One arrived and departed.

Reagan has usually been fatalistic about security measures to protect him, but he told the Citizens for America group that he no longer complains about having to wear a bulletproof vest.

As usual, he praised the Secret Service and said, in response to the questioner concerned about security at the State of the Union address, "Knock on wood."

Then Reagan knocked on his wooden desk.